



## County Council

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**Meeting Date:** December 13, 2022  
**Submitted by:** Neal Roberts, Chief, Middlesex-London Paramedic Service  
**SUBJECT:** OFFLOAD NURSE REPORT

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### **BACKGROUND:**

In 2003 Ontario faced an outbreak of SARS. To ensure the safety of healthcare workers during this outbreak, new parameters were put in place in emergency departments. These additional measures resulted in longer registration and triaging processes for paramedics when they arrived in the emergency departments. To move through this process took an average of 30 minutes.

Upon resolution of the SARS outbreak these measures remained in place. The additional wait time that was created during SARS began to increase, as patient volumes increased, beyond the 30 minutes seen before. Paramedics began arriving at emergency departments to find that there were no patient care spaces for the patients. Paramedics would continue to provide care and monitor their patients in the hallways. This wait time (time in excess of 30 minutes to register and triage the patient) became known as an "offload delay".

### **ANALYSIS:**

When they began, offload delays were not common and short. Today offload delays are common and are extremely long often spanning more than 12+ hours in length. Offload delays are an inordinate strain on paramedics and the service. Every hour that a paramedic crew spends on offload delay is one less hour that they can respond to 911 calls. When these ambulance resources are pulled from the 911 system to sit in hospital hallways, more paramedic resources are required to be staffed and put back in to the 911 system to respond to 911 calls.

There are many factors that contribute to offload delays such as lack of patient care spaces in the emergency department or in the hospital, increased admissions, lack of long-term care spaces in the community, lack of primary care in the community, increasing call volume from an aging population and community growth, etc. but the

result downstream is a drain on the emergency resources in the community because paramedics are kept in hallways on offload delays.

In the early days following SARS the Ministry of Health introduced a temporary program to help address the developing issue of offload delays. The Dedicated Offload Nurse Program (DONP) provided paramedic services with temporary funding for a dedicated nurse in the emergency departments that would assume care for patients in hallways releasing paramedics that would otherwise be on offload delays back in to the 911 system. This program requires paramedic services to enter in to an agreement with the hospitals.

This program has remained in effect and unchanged since its inception. The Dedicated Offload Nurse Program is not a solution to offload delays but provides temporary relief and assists in restoring resources back to the 911 system. Offload delays have increased in frequency and duration and have outpaced the efficacy of the Dedicated Offload Nurse Program.

At present, Middlesex-London Paramedic Service has an agreement with LHSC to provide a dedicated offload nurse to both Victoria and University emergency departments. The staffing for the dedicated offload nurse is for 16 hours per day seven (7) days per week, which expired March 31, 2022.

The Province of Ontario announced in the 2022-2023 budget an increase of an additional 7 million dollars for paramedic services to address offload delay pressures and enhance their Dedicated Offload Nurse Programs. Middlesex-London Paramedic Service submitted the required business case to the Ministry of Health twice for increased funding to provide staffing 24 hours per day.

To date the Ministry of Health has not yet responded to the business case submitted by Middlesex-London Paramedic Service but our current funding envelope for 16 hours of staffing 7 days per week remains unchanged. Middlesex-London Paramedic Service is required to renew the service agreement with LHSC for the continued implementation of this program.

Once confirmed funding for the period of April 1, 2022 – March 31, 2023 is confirmed Middlesex-London Paramedic Service will review and update with Middlesex County Legal the current service agreement. Over the past decades, the relationship with LHSC for this program has been collaborative and cooperative and Middlesex-London Paramedic Service does not anticipate any significant changes to this agreement.

#### **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:**

The Dedicated Offload Nurse Program (DONP) is funded 100 percent from the Ministry of Health.

**ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:**

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives: Promoting Service Excellence in that Middlesex-London Paramedic Service is ensuring the continuation of the delivery of high-performance paramedic services.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

THAT the Offload Nurse Report be received for information.